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AUTHOR Partridge, Susan
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ABSTRACT

This essay contends that while schools and society are undoubtedly becoming increasingly multicultural, teachers and parents need to emphasize the common bonds that hold U.S. citizens together instead of emphasizing differences that separate them. Personal memories and recent journal and newspaper articles are drawn upon to support this view of multiculturalism and multicultural education. An 11-item bibliography is included. (DB)

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Multiculturalism Remembered, Current Status, Future

by

Susan Partridge

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Multiculturalism Remembered, Current Status, Future

It is strongly and sincerely believed that respect for various cultures can begin in the home. If parents show no prejudice, it is unlikely that their children will. This belief is founded on decades of personal experience living and teaching in rural areas, suburbia and urban areas in which mixed cultures were found. As a matter of fact, in one community there was only one native American family.

Though this is an entirely different era, with ever-increasing technological wonders, with many social programs -- social security, unemployment compensation and welfare, and an increasing number of groups of citizens protesting what they consider unjust, some personal remembrances are offered because it is believed that they contain many of the "ingredients" still necessary for making multiculturalism work for the good of all.

The people, both native and foreign-born, in the areas mentioned above were thankful for their freedom. They were proud people, with a common goal; i.e. to earn a living; they were caring, and they shared joys -- the birth of a baby -- and sorrows -- the death of a loved one, for example. Obviously, they didn't all think alike, but differences -- different religious persuasions, etc. were respected and did not stand in the way of achieving the common goal -- the best for all.

Some community projects, a sewing school on Saturdays and a Sunday school are remembered. A German immigrant started the sewing school and a native American, the Sunday school. These ladies had considerable talent to share. Everybody was welcome,

and attendance indicated that many were interested and profited by the experiences.

An incident of yesteryear showing that kindness takes precedence over color is recalled. A young mother whose apartment was on the second floor of a private home reported this incident.

It was summer, and she was in bad need of a block of ice for her icebox in order to keep her little girl's food fresh. It was difficult to find a company that would deliver one block of ice, and she had no means of getting it herself. Finally, she found a company that would deliver, and a black man was sent with the ice. When she opened the door to let him in, she had her little girl (age 2) in her arms. The child kept reaching toward the man. Her mother explained that she was trying to kiss him because he had brought them the ice. It's encouraging to know that even in a child as young, kindness makes color go unnoticed.

It is also believed that respect is "a two-way street" and that it is better earned than forced. Magic Johnson who retired from a brilliant NBA career on November 7, 1991, is reported by John Nadel (6) in an Associated Press article as saying something that is in agreement with this belief. Nadel reported:

> "People ask me all the time, what do I miss about playing?" Johnson said. "It's not the playing part I miss the most; it's just being one of the boys."
>
> "You never know how great it is to be one of 12 guys," Johnson said, his voice cracking with emotion. "You work for eight months and try to be champions. I have special memories of every team I played on. I think it's not the team, but the players themselves. We sweated, fought together, we lost together, and we won together."

These young men had a common purpose. It is felt that those who design multi-ethnic programs should pay heed to the common goal and strive to resolve differences in order to reach the goal.

Example after example, year after year, decade after decade have been convincing that it's the person, not his/her religion, race, political persuasion, but rather such attributes as his/her honesty, integrity, strong humanitarian sense and talents that earn respect and admiration

A very refined lady became interested, initially, in her "new" neighbors, who were Czechs, because of their interest and talent in doing beautiful and unusual handwork and also because of their warm personalities. The lady, who never used profanity or slang, overlooked their occasional use of such words. She seemed to feel that they used them to express a strong feeling of the moment, probably for lack of words that would be in better taste. She felt that her example of much more acceptable speech would be more effective than an expression of distaste for theirs.

Many foreign students in our schools have gained the respect and admiration of their peers by applying themselves diligently and achieving much against all odds. Not only were they respected for their scholarship but also for themselves. A young black man in a high school with a largely white student body was elected unanimously as captain of the baseball team. His teammates liked him as a great ball player but mainly for himself.

Schools have been held accountable for many things, among them student progress, student behavior in school and on the buses,

provision of nourishing lunches and snacks and parental involvement. Currently, there is considerable pressure on them to pay heed to multiculturalism. Compounding the problem is the fact that there are many different opinions as to how this should be done.

Certainly schools should not be expected to be entirely responsible for things that should be shared by many others. It is felt that multiculturalism is much "bigger" than the schools; it involves the family, the community, business and government, to mention some.

There are a number of things schools can do, and some schools are doing just that. Some teachers are sharing successful multicultural activities in their classroom in considerable detail. Doris Walker-Dalhouse (10), in a very recent issue of The Reading Teacher, described her use of African-American literature to increase ethnic understanding.

She explained the school population as follows: "Students of Norwegian origin comprised 88% of the class and 91% of the school population. Six percent of the total school population was Hispanic, while Asians, African-Americans, American Indians, and Vietnamese students together comprised 3% of the population."

She offered a number of titles of books used in her unit, gave the gist of each story and also included titles of books used in a final unit activity in which "students read, independently, stories about children their age from other cultural ethnic groups."

Certainly a balance is needed in our various multicultural programs; all ethnic groups must be involved. As Diane Ravitch

(7) so aptly put it, "The mission of our public schools should be to instill in children our shared, not our separate, cultures." She explains:

> We don't have to look far to see the dire consequences of ethnocentrism. The Soviet Union, India, Lebanon, Canada, Yugoslavia, and South Africa are current examples where competing nationalisms are causing social havoc. No nation -- certainly not our own -- has been innocent of the brutal excesses of ethnocentrism. Throughout human history, people have demonstrated their readiness to persecute and oppress those who are different from themselves. Under no circumstances should the curriculum be patterned to stir ethnocentric pride or to make children feel that their self-worth is derived from their race or ethnic origins.
>
> If the public schools abandon their historic mission as the common schools of the nation, if they instead foster racial and ethnic separation, they will forfeit their claim to public support. If the public schools relinquish their responsibility for teaching children an awareness of their American identity, then they will lose their privileged status as public schools.
>
> If they remain true to their historic role, the public schools will fulfill their obligations to serve as a bulwark against ethnic chauvinism and counter the forces of social fragmentation. And they will exercise their responsibility to teach democratic values and the civic ethics that promote respect for other human beings, without regard to their race or social origins.

Other concerned people seem to share Ravitch's feelings. James A. Banks (2) says, "If we are to remain a free and pluralistic society, we can neither do away with the western canon nor exclude the contributions of people of color. Multicultural education is an education for freedom that is essential in today's ethnically polarized and troubled world."

Albert Shanker (8) has said that it is important that we teach our children about each other's and other people's customs and values. He explains that this doesn't mean that they need not hold

people's practices and also our own up to moral scrutiny. He asks several questions in support of his belief, among them, "Do we want to respect and accept the beliefs that led Chinese leaders to massacre dissenting students in Tianamen Square! And what about the beliefs that allowed the Ayatollah Khomeini to pronounce a death sentence on Salman Rushdie and the current leader in Iran to confirm the sentence?"

Curriculum reform is inevitable if multiculturalism is to be adequately and fairly addressed. Though knowledge is essential to multicultural literacy, alone it cannot develop such things as caring, empathy and a commitment to democratic change. James A. Banks (2) explains:

> The most meaningful way to prepare teachers to involve students in multicultural experiences that will enable them to know, care, and participate in democratic action is to involve teachers themselves in multicultural experiences that focus on these goals. When teachers have gained knowledge about cultural and ethnic diversity, looked at that knowledge from different ethnic and cultural perspectives, and taken action to make their own lives and communities more culturally sensitive and diverse, they will have the knowledge and skills needed to help transform the curricular canon as well as the hearts and minds of their students. Only then will students in our schools and colleges be able to attain the knowledge, skills, and perspectives needed to participate in next century's global society.

Many years ago an elderly black lady in Harlem, N.Y. gave what is believed to be a very profound statement regarding the importance of heart change in achieving goals. She said something to the effect that providing urban housing for some people was not the answer; their hearts had to be changed.

As stated earlier, multiculturalism today is much "bigger" than the homes and the schools; however, many ideas for initiating valid multicultural programs can be found in reputable current educational periodicals in which teachers have given rather detailed reports of their successful programs. Other concerned people have stated their beliefs about multicultural education in such a way that the reader has no difficulty getting the message. It is believed that this sharing of beliefs might help others to "come to grips" with their own beliefs.

Current local newspapers have also been carrying articles of interest. In a very recent issue of The Herald Sun, a Durham, N.C. newspaper, Michael Yarbrough (11) reported on a program to help teens face prejudice head-on. He explained the "North Carolina Students Teach and Reach" (NC STAR) program which promotes reducing racial tensions while increasing community awareness among young people. He informed his readers that this week Triangle (Durham, Chapel Hill, Raleigh) college students will visit 180 classrooms representing every middle and high school in the Durham city and county districts to lead open discussions about discrimination and prejudice.

Still other actions for promoting multiculturalism have been taken, one by the N.Y. State's Social Studies Review and Development Committee whose interest, as reported by Eleanor Armour-Thomas and William A. Profried (1), is to "develop "multiple perspectives" in all students by helping them to see the historical and contemporary realities from a variety of viewpoints, to "hear the voices of

those who have previously been neglected in high-school history texts" and to "see that their own parochialism is not universal truth."

Certain laws have also been enacted to protect ethnic groups from intimidation. Kammie Michael (5) reported the first Durham use of the ethnic intimidation law that went into effect on October 1, 1991. She explained the law: "The charge of ethnic intimidation is used in cases of assault to a person, damage to property or threats of assault or damage based on the person's race, color, religion, nationality or country of origin." Four Durham residents were arrested and charged with violating the law.

It is believed that teacher education and competent in-service help for teachers must receive serious consideration if multicultural programs are to be in the best interests of all. John Goodlad (4) has described what is felt to be a step in the right direction for improving teacher education. Witness has been borne again and again, throughout decades, of the failure of certain educational programs simply because teachers who had no part in designing the programs were told to use them. Goodlad says:

> I'd say, in fact, that any teacher education program created or conducted without the collaboration of surrounding schools is defective. And I mean collaboration where the schools are equal partners. School people need to bring pressure on the universities. They need to insist, "We want to be part of this; we're going to be in on it." After 10 years of work, with over a dozen school and university partnerships, starting at UCLA, I can say that in such partnerships it is just assumed that the school will play a very significant role and that school people will be teacher educators.

A number of conscientious teachers have voiced their inadequacy with the many advances in technology in use in the classrooms. Surely adequate in-service help should be readily available. Empowerment of teachers might help to get the needed and sought-after help.

As indicated before, there are many ways in which teachers can help themselves. Throughout decades, librarians have been found helpful. Unfortunately, some cases have been reported in which librarians have been used more or less as baby sitters. They have reported that a whole class would be sent to the library with no particular purpose; this denied the librarian his/her role and also denied the students a profitable experience. Librarians know books; it's their business, and most have been willing to share this knowledge.

Newspaper articles and articles found in reputable educational periodicals provide food for thought. A very recent article found in the editorial section of the Durham Herald Sun seems to show that the writer thought a lot about multicultural education and then narrowed his/her thoughts to what he/she felt most important.

The writer titled the article "Emphasize Our Oneness" and wrote that the ethnic composition of our country is diversifying faster than at any time before and so it's becoming a serious issue for society as a whole and also for colleges and universities.

He/she quoted Dr. Donna Benson (3), the interim chancellor at N.C. Central University, as saying, "Multiculturalism is not an option. It is a fundamental reality of our emerging world order."

To Dr. Benson's additional statement that North Carolina's 16 public universities must prepare for vastly different student populations drawn from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, the writer wrote, "No doubt, she's right. But how well these students -- Asians, African-Americans, Hispanic and others -- will live and work together is a question whose answer cannot long be evaded." He/she believes that a large part of the answer must come in emphasizing common bonds that hold Americans together instead of emphasizing differences that separate us.

It is believed that the writer is correct in saying that too many of the advocates of unalloyed multiculturalism on our campuses are portraying minorities as group victims rather than participants in a society that rewards individual achievement.

Most of us are aware that Americans have respected and loved many from various ethnic groups who have applied themselves diligently, achieved in various careers -- entertainment, business, education, sports -- to become America's heros.

The writer finished the article with a quote from Robert Stoltz (9) whose words, he feels, sum up the multicultural challenge for education in North Carolina: "We must emerge as one people, one nation." The writer's closing words, "We have done it before. We can do it again."

Personal witness to multicultural harmony leaves no doubt that "we have done it before" and, with a lot of thinking and soul-searching, "we can do it again."

Conclusion

It is concluded that multiculturalism in our schools should be adequately and fairly addressed and that the schools should receive the cooperation of others concerned with multiculturalism, among them the homes, the community, business and the government.

Implications

1. Strive toward the common goal, the democratic way of life for all. Resolve differences to reach that goal.

2. Maintain a balance in the various multicultural programs and maintain a balance between multiculturalism and civic education.

3. Try to instill in children our shared cultures, not our separate cultures.

4. Avoid loss of "the public school status" by teaching children an awareness of their American identity.

5. Encourage teachers to take part in multicultural community activities.

6. Encourage them to take advantage of the many pertinent articles found in reputable educational periodicals and to be alert to information provided through the media; this provides material for their thinking.

7. Greater empowerment of teachers is needed.

8. Adequate and regular in-service help should be provided for them.

9. Cooperation between universities and the schools is needed for appropriate teacher training in this hi-tech age.

10. Parental involvement is needed as parents have been known to sway their children in the direction the schools seek and, unfortunately, against it, in some cases. Their involvement might avoid this.

11. Try to instill in young people that achievement is duly recognized in America regardless of the ethnic background or social status of the achiever. As a matter of fact, many young people including baseball players, football players, actors, actresses, TV personalities, etc. have become national heros.

12. Educators must give some attention to funding; therefore, they should exercise their voting rights and vote for those politicians who are truly interested in the schools and not in their own aggrandizement.

13. Teachers and parents should take every opportunity to recognize and encourage those attributes, beyond knowledge, that are felt to be necessary for successful multicultural programs, among them caring, empathy; and the democratic way of life.

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